

## Learning to Like My Cane



**Ten years ago, I never would have thought I'd be 27 years old going to Wal-Mart at 11pm to hastily shop for a cane. I didn't even know the proper hand to hold it with. I found a \$12 black collapsible cane that wasn't terrible and I was happy to have something for the next morning's commute. Getting to and from work had become pretty tough; it took 2 ferries and 2 busses with plenty of walking in between.**

That first commute with my new cane was a learning experience, that's for sure. Right off the bat I noticed people's glances lasted longer. If my tattoos and piercings didn't get their attention, the cane sure did. I could sense the frustration of people having a hard time getting around me in the crowds. My coworkers on the other hand were super helpful and supportive.

I can't even count how many times I explained why I needed the cane during the first week. So many people assume it's for an injury and not a chronic illness. I've been asked if I was a skateboarder who just took a gnarly fall; that's one of my favs.



I use my cane for many reasons: balance, stability, security and the occasional sword fight. When I lost most of the use of my left leg, I could still stand on it okay, but I couldn't pick my foot up more than 6 inches off the ground. Having something to always lean on is very comforting when you have wobbly balance, double vision and vertigo that comes and goes.

My mobility has always been fluid with some days being way worse than others. For the most part a cane has done the trick, but recently I have had to use the electric carts at the grocery store more and more. Having a handicap parking placard has really helped a lot (but to my surprise, has also made me a target for harassment).

This year I began talking with my doctor about getting a wheelchair for the days/weeks/months that my legs are at their worst. I was surprised to learn that I'd need to be fitted for one first. You mean, I can't just walk into the wheelchair store and pick one out? My doctor explained it all and now I totally get it. It really is important to have something that fits your body.

Whether you use a wheelchair, cane, walker, crutches, steerable knee scooter, motorized wheelchair, hoveround or any assistive device, they do not make us who we are. However, that doesn't mean that our canes and chairs shouldn't look good and be something we are proud of. I'm so excited to see companies bringing well-designed products to the market. I now know my cane is the face of my MS and, just like my glasses, I like to keep it looking fresh.